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STATE OF MAINE

Citizen Trade Policy Commission

March 24, 2008

The Honorable Olympia J. Snowe
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

VIA FACSIMILE & U.S.MAIL
Facsimile: 202-224-1946

The Honorable Michael H. Michaud
United States House of Representatives
1724 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

VIA FACSIMILE & U.S.MAIL
Facsimile: 202-225-2943

The Honorable Susan M. Collins
United State Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

VIA FACSIMILE & U.S. MAIL
Facsimile: 202-224-2693

The Honorable Thomas H. Allen
United States House of Representative
1127 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

VIA FACSIMILE & U.S.MAIL
Facsimile: 202-225-5590

RE: Colombia Free Trade Agreement

Dear Senator Snowe, Senator Collins, Representative Michaud, and Representative Allen,

The Maine Citizen Trade Policy Commission (commission) voted unanimously, on February 21, 2008, to oppose the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (Colombia FTA). In general, the commission supports global trade but in light of testimony we received from Maine citizens at the February 21 public hearing and after careful consideration of the Colombia FTA provisions, it is evident to the commission that the Colombia FTA is unfavorable for the people of Maine, the U.S., and Colombia.

In 2005, in anticipation of the pending Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), the commission established the following criteria for trade agreements. The commission believes that trade agreements should:

- Promote and strengthen basic human rights, labor rights, and environmental protections; and raise standards in developing countries in order to prevent a “race to the bottom” which hurts Maine businesses, workers, and communities;
- Safeguard local and state lawmaking authority and level the playing field for small businesses in Maine and elsewhere;
- Guard against the unintended consequence of impeding access to basic human services such as education, healthcare, energy, and water; and
- Be negotiated in a public and transparent manner.

Although the Colombia FTA was designed to strengthen Colombia’s civil society and to open its markets to economic opportunities with the U.S., we believe that it does not meet the above standards for a free trade agreement, and will result in an overall negative impact on our economies, our environment, and on working conditions.

Unfortunately, many of the flawed provisions in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which does not meet the commission’s standards for a trade agreement, are also contained in the Colombia Agreement.

The Colombia FTA would continue to expand investor rights of foreign corporations by allowing them to challenge democratically established laws. This can force countries and states to weaken their environmental, labor and public health laws, among others, to avoid the potential of costly litigation thereby giving foreign corporations undue influence in shaping domestic public policy. The commission has established opposition to these investor-state rights and continues to oppose this infringement on state sovereignty.

At our recent public hearing, we repeatedly heard testimony expressing concerns over Colombia’s human rights record. It was stated that more union leaders are murdered in Colombia than the rest of the world combined. These human rights violations are alarming and are grounds to reject the Colombia FTA.

Another specific concern raised at the public hearing regarding the Colombia FTA is the removal of the floor bans on basic agricultural crops that are currently in place to protect small farmers from bankruptcy. Leaders in the Andean region have warned that these agricultural rules would displace thousands of small farmers – as we saw in Mexico after the passage of NAFTA. The loss of farming jobs in Colombia will likely push many families into the migration flow. Colombia is the top producer of cocaine representing 2/3 of the world supply. If this FTA were ratified, it would displace thousands of Colombian peasant farmers, which could lead to increased coca production and violence.

On behalf of the citizens of Maine, the Maine Citizen Trade Policy Commission urges you to oppose the Colombia Free Trade Agreement. The commission has stated many times in the past that we support international trade because we recognize the multitude of benefits that can be derived from global trade. We cannot support the adoption of the Colombia FTA, because it absolutely fails to promote fair trade and sustainable economic growth in the U.S. and abroad, and adoption of its provisions would send the message to the world that cheap labor, no matter what the social costs, should be rewarded.

Sincerely,

Senator Margaret Rotundo, Co-Chair

Representative John Patrick, Co-Chair

CC: Governor John E. Baldacci